

MINUTES

BRAAM OVERSIGHT PANEL

Outlook Conference Room and Service Level Conference Room

May 16 and 17, 2005

Panel members: John Landsverk (Chair), Jess McDonald, Dorothy Roberts, Jan McCarthy (Jeanine Long was unable to attend due to medical obligations.)

Guests: Charles Shelan, Steve Baxter, Daniela Baxter, Representative Ruth Kagi, Claudia Rowe, Laurie Lippold, Paola Maranan, Jim Theofolis, Kiki Keizer

Plaintiffs' Attorneys: William Grimm, Casey Trupin, Tim Ferris

Assistant Attorney General: Steve Hassett

I. Robin Arnold-Williams and Cheryl Stephani: Discussion With Panel

The Secretary of the Department of Social and Health Services and the Assistant Secretary for Children's Administration spoke to the Panel. The two leaders briefly reviewed their backgrounds, as well as their experiences with foster care issues. Ms. Williams said that the Braam settlement is an agreement between the plaintiffs and the State of Washington and will receive priority attention from her administration.

II. Budget Cuts in the Children's Administration

The plaintiffs' attorneys commented on recent budget cuts in foster care services taken because of a budget shortfall in the Children's Administration. The attorneys requested that the Panel focus on these cuts and the negative consequences to foster care youth. There was general discussion about this topic, with the state's attorney expressing disagreement that this was an appropriate role for the Panel.

John Landsverk indicated the Children's Administration previously requested that the Panel become involved with budget issues with the 2005 Legislature, and this new request was from the plaintiffs' attorneys. Landsverk indicated that the Panel chose not to become involved with budget issues this last session, and had also determined not to enter into fact finding concerning the recent budget reductions. This activity, he explained, would delay the Panel's work under the settlement agreement. The Panel, therefore, decided instead to press forward with its identified tasks.

Landsverk urged the state and plaintiffs' attorneys to discuss their mutual concerns, and to resolve as many issues as possible with informal communication.

The group discussed how the Panel's products will be reviewed by the parties and the stakeholders. After extensive discussion, it was decided that separate distribution patterns be established for the two types of Panel products. The initial Panel products of outcomes, benchmarks, and action steps will be simultaneously distributed to both parties and stakeholders. For future monitoring reports—the reports that indicate how the state has

performed relative to the benchmarks and goals—the distribution plan will be different. For these monitoring reports, attorneys from both sides will receive copies simultaneously and there will be an embargo on distribution for a specific time period that will be determined in the future. This procedure will allow for the parties to raise questions and concerns and to have those addressed prior to public release of the documents.

III. Review of Adolescent Services

The Panel discussed draft standards concerning the adolescent service elements in the settlement agreement. Panel members reviewed draft language that was prepared for discussion purposes only and was not distributed to the plaintiffs or guests.

The discussion was wide ranging and included comments from DSHS staff as well as stakeholders on the following topics:

- How should the Panel address issues of disproportionality and disparity? Should specific outcomes and benchmarks be set on these topics, or woven throughout the document in each related section?
- Although each element (goal) in the settlement has its individual details, there are common aspects that need attention in each, including the involvement of the family.
- What voice should adolescents have in selecting/rejecting a placement?
- What level of detail does the state maintain regarding the educational achievements of youth in foster care? How can the state increase these achievements?
- Several efforts are occurring in Washington related to increasing the educational attainment of foster youth. How can the Panel's work intersect with these?
- Youth who are “aging out” of foster care deserve special attention.
- For youth who have run away from a placement, the routes back into the system are limited.

IV. Review of Mental Health Standards

The Panel also discussed draft standards concerning the mental health elements in the settlement agreement. As was the case with adolescent services, members reviewed draft language that was prepared for discussion purposes only. John Landsverk indicated that because the discussion was very preliminary, documents would not be released to the parties or stakeholders at this time.

DSHS staff and stakeholders contributed to the discussion. The topics included the following:

- Whether goals should be set at the 100 percent level for the population. (Is this a realistic level? If it is not set at 100 percent, what happens to those youth in foster care? Some parts of the agreement already set the goal and can only be adjusted later.)

- The Regional Support Networks provide mental health services, including services to youth in foster care. What are the key policy drivers that determine the amount and type of services that are available to these youth? If there is a gap in services, is it caused by a supply-side problem or insufficient resources, or both?)
- What happens when foster parents feel unable to care for a child any longer? Are there emergency resources that they can access?

V. Next Meeting

The Panel will meet next in the Seattle area on June 27 and 28, 2005.